Developing capabilities for social inclusion: engaging diversity through inclusive school communities

Linda J. Graham,
Children & Families Research Centre
Macquarie University

Valerie Harwood
Faculty of Education
University of Wollongong

Abstract
The effort to make schools more inclusive, together with the pressure to retain students until the end of secondary school, has greatly increased both the number and educational requirements of students enrolling in their local school. Of critical concern, despite years of research and improvements in policy, pedagogy and educational knowledge, is the enduring categorisation and marginalization of students with diverse abilities. Research has shown that it can be difficult for schools to negotiate away from the pressure to categorise or diagnose such students, particularly those with challenging behaviour. In this paper, we highlight instances where some schools have responded to increasing diversity by developing new cultural practices to engage both staff and students; in some cases, decreasing suspension while improving retention, behaviour and performance.

> There is, in fact, a crucial valuational difference between the human-capital focus and the concentration on human capabilities – a difference that relates to some extent to the distinction between means and ends. The acknowledgment of the role of human qualities in promoting and sustaining economic growth – momentous as it is – tells us nothing about *why* economic growth is sought in the first place. If, instead, the focus is, ultimately, on the expansion of human freedom to live the kind of lives that people have reason to value, then the role of economic growth in expanding these opportunities has to be integrated into that more foundational understanding of the process of development as the expansion of human capability to lead more worthwhile and more free lives. (Sen, 1999, p. 295, emphasis in original)

Introduction

In the above epigraph, Nobel Prize Laureate Amartya Sen describes how the goal of human flourishing becomes overwhelmed when our energies are restricted to the production of human-capital in the service of economic growth. His argument is simple: economic growth should be harnessed as a vehicle to human flourishing, not the other way around. Recent assessment of contemporary society by philosopher Clive Hamilton (2003; 2005) would suggest that we currently have these priorities in reverse order. Our motive in this paper is to

make an analogous point with regard to the purposes of schooling. When the aims of education are hitched to economic growth, desirable "outcomes" become reduced to those which can be measured, and focus shifts from the development of *means to ends* (or the development of capabilities) to ends that are presumed to be self-fulfilling. This can be seen in the current preoccupation with "basic skills" and the methods through which we assess and compare them. In ignoring the foundational contribution that education can make to human flourishing however, such logic erodes the ability of schools to contribute to the development of human capabilities *despite their inherent necessity for optimal student achievement.* Too often, the system response is to identify students "at-risk" of not meeting the standards; however, there remains little understanding of the dangers that arise as a result: stigmatisation, disengagement, segregation and exclusion.

Such effects are poignantly depicted in the following statement made by the principal of Kingfisher Primary School,[1] one of the two case study schools reported in this paper.

> We were a school that had two IM [2] classes… but I've restructured it… they were here and they were a problem… The class became a behaviour class rather than an IM class. And these kids were ostracised out there by their peers. They were seen as "the IM's". They grouped together as a small group. They got aggressive - wouldn't mix. They were embarrassed. They were shy. They were aggressive. They were angry. They weren't learning. They were kids who, when they started an argument, they wanted to fight because they didn't understand the arguments… But I didn't like the system because the other kids, they become more noticeable amongst other kids. So that system was disbanded, and we now have those IM kids sprinkled in other classes. We've still got those two positions, but I use those teachers as supplements to the other teachers [to] reduce class sizes. (Principal, KPS)

While it may well be the case that awareness of the problems of marginalisation can be the stimulus for revisiting accepted practices, we propose that a more deep-seated appreciation of the intricacies of engagement premised on the expansion of capabilities is vital. In the above example, and in others reported throughout this paper, approaches to engagement were developed that, as we will illustrate, 'expanded human capability'. To this end, we present two case-studies of innovative schools operating in disadvantaged areas of New South Wales, Australia, to discuss what can be accomplished when capability is foregrounded. This analysis is based on empirical data from research investigating the views of primary school principals on inclusive education (see Graham & Spandagou, 2008). In this study, a small sample (15) of primary school principals from metropolitan, regional and rural areas of New South Wales (NSW) were invited to participate in interviews lasting from 60 to 150 minutes. 13 participants representing 8 of the 10 educational regions in NSW participated. All interviews were

conducted in the schools and travelling to each site allowed the researchers to get a sense of the physical environment, as well as the wider social context. Each interview was audio-taped for transcription purposes and the principals' narratives were examined to identify themes relating to inclusive education in New South Wales (Graham & Spandagou, 2008). Before data collection commenced, permission to conduct research in government schools was sought via the State Educational Research Approval Process (SERAP) process. In the course of granting that approval, representatives from the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSWDET) expressed an interest in learning about what innovative practices were occurring in the schools and how those initiatives might be supported and developed elsewhere. In visiting each of the participating schools, the first author found several examples of school-based innovation; however, here we concentrate on two schools that experienced significant success from initiatives producing tangible results in the area of school culture, student engagement and behaviour.

Studying inclusive school communities

While there is considerable research emphasising the importance of school culture for the inclusion of students with disabilities (Carrington, 1999; Carrington & Elkins, 2005), there is relatively little that investigates how difference itself might drive the development of new cultural practices in schools and how such practices can enhance the knowledge and resource capabilities of both students and school practitioners. In the two case-study schools presented here, staff drew on knowledge banks existing within the school to develop holistic, creative and cohesive responses to issues that they found could not be solved in the "usual ways". The success of these responses was evident in their generative, developmental effect. For example in one of the schools, students previously tailed by individual teacher aides to prevent incidents in play areas were invited to become involved in a "transitional playground." Here they were taught game skills and the rules of highly competitive sports by enthusiastic volunteer teachers. Not only did the school find that this led to a significant decrease in playground altercations and suspension, but these previously friendless students developed "game-cred" and were sought after to play in teams in the general playground.

Another effect was the development of strong bonds between the teachers' on-duty in the transitional playground and students with notorious reputations. In subsequent staff interactions, these teachers were found to "correct the record" whenever conversations about these students took place, which led to the students being viewed more positively and more likely to receive a "fair-go" elsewhere in the school. This approach was significant for another

very important reason. The development of the "transitional playground" at this particular school required no additional funding. Across the 13 schools visited during the study only three principals expressed satisfaction with the level of funding and resources they received. One of those schools is not included as a case-study here, as it served families from a high socioeconomic area and received large amounts of funding via parent contributions and community fund-raising.

Without doubt, there were some excellent initiatives taking place in this school however it was evident that schools in advantaged areas experience less adversity when engaging with "diversity" than those where diverse cultures and languages combine with low levels of parent education, poverty, substance abuse and despair. It was also evident during the research that the success of inclusive practices was highly contextual (Graham & Spandagou, 2008). What might work in a relatively advantaged school did not work in schools facing greater degrees of challenge. These observations provide support for Teese's (2006, p. 158) argument that,

> Real innovation is not going to come from the high end of schooling… We have to look elsewhere for innovation – for system-wide change in the fundamental qualities of teaching and learning. And our most likely candidates are going to be the schools where everything depends on relationships between individuals. These are the disadvantaged schools.

Our discussion in this paper gives close consideration of the engagement practices in two schools faced with disadvantage, a decision both reflective of Teese (2006) and of the research findings. Prior to discussion of the schools however, we outline how Amartya Sen's capability approach can be utilised as a conceptual framework for such an analysis. This is followed by case studies of the two schools that adopted innovative practices or programs of reform, Tralee Public School and Kingfisher Public School. We then analyse the effect of those initiatives in order to provide a theoretical framework for understanding what these practices did, as well as how and why they worked.

Enhancing capabilities: developing the means to achieve ends

Amartya Sen's (1992) influential work has shown that the redistribution of primary goods is insufficient to redress inequality for persons possess different abilities affecting their conversion of opportunities into outcomes. Sen (1979) argues that we must refocus attention on the development of capabilities that will enable persons to both conceive and achieve lives they have reason to value. Underpinning the capability approach is the concept of positive liberty or

"agency freedom" and the recognition that choice (or the exercise of liberty) requires a level of capability that is neither equally distributed nor innate. As Melanie Walker (Walker, 2005, p. 104) points out, "Sen's core concepts are those of 'functionings' and 'capabilities'". The distinction and inter-relationship between these are of importance, and a point that brings light to the issues of engagement that we are concerned to explore. Citing Sen, Walker explains that, "A functioning is 'the various things a person may value doing or being' (Sen, 1999, p. 75), the practical realisation of one's chosen way of life. *Capability refers to our freedom to promote or achieve valuable functionings*" (our emphasis, Walker, 2005, p. 104). In the earlier statement provided by the principal of Kingfisher Public School, the segregated IM classes were clearly limiting the students' capability to achieve functionings as valued students in the school. Segregation led to the students being 'ostracised' and 'feeling embarrassed'. However, the changes made (disbanding the class, alternative use of the IM teacher support) can be viewed as strategies that enhanced not only student capability but the capability of the school to engage with these students more effectively. It can be argued that such positive changes are underpinned by a philosophy that values and promotes the means to freedom.

In educational terms, this equates to the support and development of academic and behavioural[3] capabilities that lead to "freedom in the range of options a person has in deciding what life to lead" (Dreze & Sen, 1995, p. 10). Sen himself points to the important role of compulsory education in the development of capabilities, but as Saito (2003, p. 27) signals, 'in a country with a very successful education system in existence… compulsory education does not necessarily enhance children's capabilities'. For this reason, we caution that Sen's capability approach is in danger of perpetuating an individual deficit model – if used naively. The temptation may arise to focus simply on building the individual capacity of students without recognising what structural and political barriers impede their participation. To better 'operationalise' the capability approach for use in inclusive educational research, we therefore draw on perspective from the field of Disability Studies.

Enabling access

The social model of disability, although criticised by some for diminishing the lived experiences of people with a disability, is a profound conceptual tool that we deploy here to introduce the notion of "access". The simple realisation that wheelchair users are incapacitated by kerbs but perfectly capable of crossing the street when dips are provided is a concept that we draw upon here to illustrate barriers to participation and the value of modifying them. This conceptual tool takes similar issue with the notion of equal opportunity. For example, one

might say that a wheelchair user has an equal opportunity to attend a concert because many tickets have been issued and they were able to purchase theirs on-line. The night of the concert arrives however and the wheelchair user cannot participate on an equal basis because (a) there was no wheelchair access to the auditorium, or (b) they were directed to a seating area where their view was soon obscured by a standing audience. These are relatively simplistic examples but they do illustrate that "opportunity" is seldom equal and that barriers to participation *as well* as the development of individual capabilities must be considered if persons are to make constructive use of the variety of means available to them. To further develop this lens in order to make theoretical sense of the case-study data, we turn now to dissect the notion of access and the inter-relation between the individual/personal and the social/structural.

Conditions and criteria of access

Although landmark studies into educational inequality (Coleman et al, 1966) have pointed to the limited effects of educational interventions against the weight of social inequality in general, the relevant message both then and now is not that such interventions lack effect. Indeed, they help to build what Burbules, Lord and Sherman (1982) call individual "criteria of access" - especially if they are used in generative ways to improve the power persons have 'to convert primary goods into the achievement of ends' (Sen, 1990, p. 120). However on its own this addresses only one half of the equation – individual student capacity – and neglects barriers to participation.

To more effectively conceptualise what it takes to realize educational opportunity, Burbules, Lord and Sherman (1982) have conceptually re-defined opportunity as *access*. This notion of access is then split into two domains: (i) conditions of access, and (ii) criteria of access. A person's access to something can be affected by personal factors such as physical or intellectual ability and this qualifies as a *criterion* relating to their chances of being successful in their ambition. However, external-structural factors can also affect a person's acquisition of or access to something and this, say Burbules et al. (1982), is a *condition of access*. The example given is a small child wishing to reach a book on a shelf. The height of the shelf is a condition of access. The height of the child (and their ability to jump or find another means of reaching the book) is a criteria of access. *Crucially, it is the height of the shelf (the condition of access) which determines what criteria are necessary in the first place*.

Within many educational contexts, individual criteria of access (or the lack thereof) gain the most attention and this often results in a deficit-model approach. The focus remains on what the student brings to the field, with neglect to how external-structural factors (like the

academic curriculum, discipline policies or cultural expectations) may operate as a *condition of access* (see Graham, 2007c). Sen's capability approach makes it clear however, that we need to redirect our focus on the *means to ends* or what we describe here as *access to educational opportunity.* Furthermore work by Burbules et al. (1982), which helps us to break "access" down to its constituent parts, shows that it is essential to address both the barriers to (conditions) and capacity for (criteria) participation. We explore this accent on the difference between the conditions and criteria of access in the following discussion of the two case-study schools.

Tralee Public School (TPS) and Kingfisher Public School (KPS)

Tralee is a large primary school (K-6) in the Western Sydney region of New South Wales, Australia. The school enrols approximately 800 students, over 68 per cent of which come from a non-English speaking background. As described by the principal, four key groups feed into the school:

> One of them is what you would "Old Tralee" Western Sydney-type demographic, which is working class, aspirational, I guess, without using that as a derogatory term… Value of properties rising, most work in the local area, or go into Sydney, commute in.
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> We've [also] got a big public housing estate which… about ten years ago I suppose, changed from being the battlers who are good, low income families using public housing, they've then moved when they could afford it into private housing in nearby areas; so now it's degenerated to the point where it's a huge social problem area. Tiny little houses packed in close together… So, we've got drug problems, we've got violence problems, we've got dysfunctional family problems, we've got AVOs, we've got, you know… so there's that demographic.
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> [Then] we've got the two OC classes… Just like selective high school, there's a selective primary strand, which is called OC (Opportunity Class) and we feed in families and their brothers and sisters, and they're largely, I guess, Chinese, Indian, Malaysian, Singaporean, Sri Lankan demographic and ethnic cultural background; very high achievement focus for their kids.
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> And then we've got, most recently, the expanding population of refugee students - that's the fourth demographic… Our new arrivals now are coming away [from] Africa, and we're starting to pick up a lot of Middle Eastern refugees, because the refugee process for Sudanese and Liberians has been rolled back by the government. There's not as many coming.

TPS has no additional support units or special classes other than the competitive entry Opportunity Classes. Although serving a diverse and challenging community, the school has never made it onto the Disadvantaged Schools Program[4] (see Hayes, Johnston, & King, 2009, in press) and therefore does not receive the additional support funding accessed by Kingfisher Public, the second case-study school featured in this paper. According to the principal

however, TPS is usually "the next cab off the rank" and is sometimes granted access to additional training, development, and professional learning to compensate for social disadvantage. Nonetheless the academic achievement of students, as measured by national standardised assessments is consistently above the Western Sydney region and New South Wales state average. TPS is allocated one full-time Support Teacher (Learning Assistance) for roughly 1/8 of the student population who experience difficulties in learning. The school also utilises substantial support through teacher allocations for ESL (English as a Second Language).

In recent years, TPS has become somewhat of a "magnet" school. The principal reported that parents were attracted to the Opportunity Classes and described how these were perceived as potentially beneficial to other students enrolled in the school.

> I mean, anecdotally, we've had people coming and saying, "My child is still in the womb. I want to pre-enrol them because you have an OC class." And we say it doesn't make the slightest bit of difference whether they're here or at another school, they've still got to pass the test to get in… And then we've got people who come with kids in strollers virtually, who want to get into a selective high school in Year 7, "Can we enrol here because it's got a good record in getting in?" And we say it makes not the slightest bit of difference. You know, the perception is there.

There are perhaps other forms of opportunity in which parents might be interested. The principal at TPS acknowledged the tension between the desire to do well in standardised measures of performance and the practices that might encourage (declining enrolment of particular types of students and/or exempting low performing children from assessments) but he contrasted this with the problem that learning support funding is tied to outcomes and artificially derived performance ratings serve to disadvantage schools in the long run.

> And we certainly don't turn kids away… we've got parents who come to us whose children's learning needs are there, and that's certainly not a reason to turn them away, and we obviously have staff who work with us here who depend on working here by the very nature of our special needs programs, so you're not going to be saying, "No, we don't want you because you've got a diagnosed disability"… And actually… we've had excellent success; we've had kids that have come to us from other schools around the area that might have been on suspension, expulsion, or come to us being very difficult, and we have a lot of success here because they get into this area and there's not a lot of other kids that they can play off, so they tend to pick up on the better behaviour.

While this is noteworthy, of concern is our finding that, beyond the two schools discussed in this paper, the majority of the principals interviewed in the study discussed how they would not accept out-of-area enrolments if the child had additional support needs; particularly if this concerned challenging behaviour. The pressure of school markets and the need to attract

enrolments was a major theme that dominated the interview data and many principals were very reluctant to "buy-in problems" that would drain scarce resources and diminish the reputation of their school.

In contrast to Tralee, Kingfisher Public School is a medium sized country school (K-6) in the Western New South Wales region.[5] Five years ago, enrolments at Kingfisher were around 500 students however that number has dropped to about 320. The school is situated in a very low socioeconomic area with a high crime rate and draws over half of its students from the neighbouring public housing estate. Over 46 per cent of KPS students come from a non-English speaking background. There are over 17 different cultural groups within the school and 25 per cent of students are Aboriginal. As described by the principal, Kingfisher was in danger of closing before he arrived:

> The school was suffering because, number one: there were small groups of parents that were tearing the school apart; the school didn't have strong leadership; the school looked terrible physically; there was no pride in the school; and they were dumbing down the curriculum … The school was on the scrapheap, basically… The teachers had low self-esteem. They didn't feel as though they had a leader, they didn't feel as though they had a purpose.

School competition was having a large effect on Kingfisher because, similar to the experience of disadvantaged schools elsewhere, KPS represented the last remaining "choice" for those who cannot exercise it (Graham, 2007b). Kingfisher's position in the school market contributed to the low morale of the teaching staff:

> …they've been to social do's where they've heard people say, "Oh, I'm not sending *my* child to Kingfisher Public next year. Why are you sending *your* child there?" So we do fight that perception.

The principal was well aware of the effects that this was having on the demographics of the school and recognised the compounding effect this would have social and educational disadvantage:

> I apply zoning very, very strongly because I know that there are some parents that probably have a historic view of KPS, and therefore when their child's ready for kindergarten: "No, I'm not going to send him to Kingfisher." So I ring up the principals and say, "Do you have any out-of-zoners?" Now, ninety-five percent of them will say no, and they'll be honest, but I've caught principals out before. They've taken the better families, OK? And that really annoys me, because I want a real mix in this school, like every other school… I'm denied that a lot by the Catholic system. I can't do anything about it… but look, if anything, people are coming here more because the image has lifted… Since I've been here we have lost one child to another school because I had a parent that said, "I love the school, but I want my child to mix with a different style of child." And I said, "Oh, for god's sake!" And I tried to argue, but I couldn't argue, and she went to [my old school].

While this principal reflects that he "can't do anything about it," in the last four years he and his staff have actually been doing quite a lot. This school was one of the most inspirational of all of the schools visited during the study. The energy was positive, the teachers were enthusiastic, cheerful and cooperative, and the children were happy, eager and outgoing. Lessons did not stop when the researchers entered classrooms and everywhere the principal went the children ran to show him what they were doing and tell him about their achievements. The teachers were proud to show off the improvements to their school and the work they and their students were doing. The principal described how the school was attempting to make a difference by bucking the trend and "raising the bar" for students who were used to very low expectations:

> A lot of the kids don't have very strong ideals. They just have this ideal that they're going to be like their mother and father, and so one of our roles here is to raise the bar, raise the vision and say, "Hey, you can be more than that. You can be this if you really want to be." We have a lot of personalised learning programmes where we meet with parents and meet with kids all the time and we say to kids, "What would you like to be? How are you going? How can we help you? Are we catering for you in an educational sense? Are we helping you become what you want to become?"

The principal strongly believed that beautifying the school would not only improve its public image but the students would begin to take pride and ownership of their school and themselves. He explained that,

> …we've got the kids to take pride in themselves, their uniform. …we've minimised swearing. We've minimised a lot of behavioural issues. You can ask any teacher out there now. It's a vastly different place to what it was four years ago - a vastly different place.

One measure of success was attendance. The principal reported that attendance had been "abysmal" but that it was now at state level. As a result of the reforms and a general "tightening up" of purpose and procedure, class rolls began to be checked properly and an attendance officer was employed two days per week to call parents and request notes for any absences. This was later followed up with positive reinforcement:

> …we just gave out the other day eighty-something congratulatory letters to kids who've been here 93% of the year. We've reached our target, so we're sending letters out, and I've got phone calls from parents saying, "That was really lovely, that I got a letter." So a lot of positives as well… I'd be proud to take you to the classrooms to see what's going on there. *Everyone's* engaged.

This emphasis on *everyone being engaged* is suggestive of how engagement at multiple levels is integral for a capability set that enables students to achieve functionings such as school

attendance. As we discussed earlier, Sen (1987, p. 36) distinguishes between these, explaining that, "A functioning is an achievement, whereas a capability is the ability to achieve", although at times it can be difficult to differentiate between these given the numerous interconnections. Engagement is a good case in point. Just as it can be conceived as supportive of functionings (such as remaining at school), engagement has intrinsic value. If a functioning is 'the various things a person may value doing or being' (Sen, 1999, p. 75), engagement cannot be passed over as an achievement of value – and as such, it can be considered a functioning that one has a right to be free to choose. Indeed, as we maintain in the following discussion, it is very worthwhile to conceive of engagement in terms of both functioning *and* capability. In the next section therefore, we focus on specific initiatives from each case-study school to examine what this might look like in practice.

The Transitional Playground at Tralee Public School

Tralee had significant issues with behaviour until school-initiated reforms were implemented four years ago. Unlike some of the other participating schools in the study, which saw improvement through the introduction of a "Level" system and greater consistency, staff at Tralee were forced to think "outside the square" to improve their responses to behaviour because traditional approaches were failing.

> And it's been good because it would have been the boys that would have been sat on so hard before, to try and make them behave. It didn't work, just didn't work… We were starting to pull our hair out with how many kids were getting through, in a term, to what would have been a very serious level of behaviour, OK? So, where you would possibly be looking at warning or suspension, that sort of thing… it was almost like, "Well, this is fun. I'm going to keep on mucking up." … And we just decided there had to be something better, because the people who were doing detentions were sitting in the classroom with kids for a week, and trying to make a difference, and it wasn't making a difference.

Given that boys formed the majority of students reaching the highest level of warning under the existing discipline policy, TPS introduced a 'Boy's Education Strategy' which included a "transitional playground" informed by the recognition that punishment is counterproductive and fails to deal with the fundamental issues behind difficult behaviour.

> And so we came up with this idea of looking at going back to their social skills – why are these kids getting into trouble? And the real reason why they're getting into trouble is that they don't know how to act appropriately with peers… It provides a very safe haven out here for them to practice, and we don't isolate them as just being naughty, because they get to bring their friend with them… Some of these kids were friendless, because they were such badly behaved kids.

The realisation that the response itself was the problem and that the school had to change what *it* was doing was significant. Tralee had a long-standing positive reputation and an experienced senior executive team that has been led by the same principal for the last two decades. Unlike another school visited during the research where the lack of regeneration at the leadership level bred an element of insularity that appeared to stifle innovation, at TPS the staff felt free to come together and to try new things. Given that the school's region is currently trialling Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) this was an audacious move.

> We haven't gone with the PBL program, because we feel that ours here at school is working equally as well. We… have a teacher who goes out and does a duty in that playground at recess and at lunchtimes. They do game skills with those children, so they do things like fitness track type activities, they do hockey, they do soccer, they do basketball, they learn how to take turns, they learn how to play appropriately.

The transition playground at Tralee is not used to punish children and this may be one of the reasons for its success. As critical scholars in inclusive education research, we are acutely aware that practices once designed to emancipate can be abused (Graham, forthcoming; Harwood & Rasmussen, 2004). Neither are we unaware of the potential for Foucauldian critique in relation to the disciplining of bodies. In this case, we hasten to add that "not everything is bad" (Foucault, 1984, p. 343) and gesture towards the Foucauldian notion of 'productive discipline' (see Watkins & Noble, 2008) to signal how we view these practices as generative of children's abilities to make decisions for themselves.

> …the punishment side of the program doesn't happen anymore because we can intervene now… we were sending those kids straight out from, say, a detention, talking to them, and thinking, "Oh, they can go out there now and behave". They couldn't, so now we intervene with this transition playground. They learn the skills and a lot of our kids are achieving success.

We will return to this theme in the discussion of Kingfisher Public School where, rather than being told what and who they can or can't be, students are asked "Are we helping you become what you want to become?" In the meantime however, it is important to discuss other important elements of Tralee's "transitional playground". One of the most impressive of these was the fact that the initiative cost nothing to implement. Since many primary schools in Australia are said to be "relying on goodwill" (APPA, 2008) this may have implications for the project's sustainability, however, we would argue that continuity in leadership and a strong commitment to look critically at schooling practice augurs well for the project's future.[6] So too does the buy-in of dedicated teachers who volunteer to work in the playground.

> …we actually only asked – that was never a "duty"… now we've got a lot of teachers who would put their hand up and want to do full duties out there rather than back in the main playground area.

This again was impressive for involvement in the transitional playground constituted an extension of individual teachers' responsibilities for, as the principal put it, "it's not just going out and supervising the kids… there's a purpose behind it". The teachers actively joined in with the children and, through the vehicle of gamesmanship, taught students more appropriate ways to interact with each other, how to win and lose gracefully and how to "have a go," as well as the more formal rules of particular sports. The real success of these responses was evident in their generative, developmental effect. For example, students previously tailed by individual teacher aides to prevent incidents in the playground were taught game skills and the rules of highly competitive sports. Not only did the school find that this led to a significant decrease in playground altercations and suspension, but these previously friendless students developed "game-cred" and were sought after to play in teams in the general playground:

> ... like Cameron… he learned how to play cricket so well he would be one of our best dead-eye bowlers in First Class. They can't wait to get him into PSSA[7] teams and some of our really difficult kids – because they've learned the game skills – are actually getting into our PSSA teams, so they've got the added bonus that they're really good at their sport, because it's almost like individual tuition. But they have a great time; they enjoy it, and as I said, the teachers are really positive.

Another effect was the development of strong bonds between the teachers' on-duty in the transitional playground and students with notorious reputations. These teachers were found to "correct the record" whenever conversations about these students took place, which led to the students being viewed more positively and more likely to receive a "fair-go" elsewhere in the school.

> I think that because a lot of our staff now haven't heard the stories, you know, "Oh, so-and-so and so-and-so in Year 1" and you go out there and you do playground duty, and he gives you a mouthful of lip or something, and then you've got this preconceived thing about this child. This transition playground has really paid a bonus, because what happens is, yes you'll hear stories like that, but then the teacher who's on the transition playground will say, "Well, out there, he's just great. He's a really terrific kid, and he really likes this, and he really likes doing this, and if you get talking to him, you'll find this…"
>
> If you ask some of our teachers how they feel about working with those kids out there now, they won't say to you, "Oh God, he's a horrible kid. All I ever get is mouth out of him," they'll say, "Oh, he's a really nice kid. He does really all the right things while he's in this playground". There's lots of positives.

While the transitional playground at TPS was developed in response to an increase in challenging behaviour and as a way to improve the social skills of students getting into strife, the initiative had a significant effect on practitioners as well. While this was not an explicit aim, it is an exceptionally important outcome. Each of the principals visited during the pilot study discussed how they took great care to place students with additional support needs with an appropriate teacher. Tralee was no exception to this rule.

> …there are some teachers who will always be very gifted dealing with those children by the very nature of their teaching styles, and when we look at basing children in a class, we look very much at the teacher and how we think they will cope [and] you're much better off to place children where you think the skills lie.

The principal at TPS acknowledged that always choosing the "right" teachers would result in burn-out but added that they deliberately built-in respite time where the "difficult" child could be sent elsewhere for periods to give the teacher a break. While this might be a good idea in the short-term to save particular teachers, overall such practices fail to change entrenched attitudes and behaviours in the teaching workforce. It also creates a loophole that lets others off the hook. Only one of the participants bucked this trend. "Tom" from a country school in northern New South Wales wryly explained how he dealt with the problem of disengaged teachers who he joked would "run over you if you don't get out of the road at ten past three!"

> My approach is to put people in teams, and to … force them to make a contribution to their teams, to not allow them to isolate themselves. You'll get a hopeless teacher if you let them get away with it, doing their own thing, doing bugger-all, and then you'll have a fantastic teacher in the next room and all the parents are going, "I want my kid in that room! I don't want him in *that* room." So to counteract that, you force them to be part of that team and to contribute and to step up.

While this goes some way towards putting pressure on disengaged teachers, such an approach still relies on the goodwill, dedication and ability of the "fantastic" teachers to discipline the not-so-fantastic. At Tralee however, the executive were not forced into confrontation with teachers as the play program has achieved a "viral" effect, improving the attitudes and participation of staff along the way.

> The teachers join in with them. Teachers who didn't know these children, perhaps had only ever saw them as these naughty, naughty kids – there's not even that stigma anymore, because all of those teachers have learned to like those kids and see them as individuals, so there's a lot more responsibility shared for kids' behaviour than there was here, say, 4 years ago when somebody used to think, "That kid's not in my class. I don't have to worry." And it's interesting, because now the teachers will come to us and say, "I'm aware so-and-so is having problems in the playground. He really hasn't got any friends, and he's just wandering around aimlessly and getting into trouble. Is there any way that I can arrange for him to come to a quiet area for a few weeks, and bring a friend, so that we can establish a friendship?"

The transitional playground at Tralee Public School saw significant changes in how children and teachers interacted with one another. Key features were how the students were explicitly taught how to be successful in the playground. First of all, this enhances students' individual *criteria of access*. When the children were supported to be successful, success bred success, leading to more positive self-image on the part of the students but also more positive attitudes by staff and more cooperation all round. The ability of students to make friends improved which led to them feeling happier about school and less inclined to pick fights with their peers. Second, and even more importantly, Tralee's transitional playground altered the *conditions of access* by changing the parameters of the race. Burbules, Lord and Sherman (1982, p. 170-171) use the analogy of a race to help them conceptualise equitable educational opportunity. Taking their analogy as our point of departure and, likening the demands of schooling to the Tour de France,[8] we contend that *inclusive* school communities are premised on the understanding that the rules and structure of the game set some up to fail. Similarly at TPS, the principal and executive came to the realisation that the boys who kept getting into trouble, and whom they expected to be able to behave following the consequence of weekly detentions, did not have the requisite skills to comply even if they wanted to. In developing the boys' social skills and in changing the parameters of the game through a supported program and more realistic demands during their transition, Tralee's playground initiative succeeded in addressing both the criteria and conditions of access to schooling success.

Kingfisher Public School: High quality teaching and 'hitting the school physically'

Describing himself as a "real entrepreneur" in obtaining funding, the principal of Kingfisher Public School told how he had set about reforming the school inside and out. The first thing on the agenda was to "hit the school physically" with bright new paint, a shiny new fence and landscaping to provide students with quiet areas around a human-made billabong[9] and a new Aboriginal "dreamtime" walk. The school also invested in a "parent bus" which was used to collect parents and bring them to school for meetings. Parent engagement was proving one of the most difficult nuts to crack at KPS but the investment in an outreach bus signified that the school was willing to make a genuine effort by first engaging itself. The program of reform at Kingfisher was significant because, while image had its place, the principal never lost sight of the main game: teaching and learning.

> …when I first came here, Stage 1 was physically like a lost city. It was filthy, there was no colour to it, there [were] no resources down there, the teachers were disorientated, and we poured resources into Stage 1 because I believed that if we start there, it'll start growing, and that's really where education starts. If they have a good kindergarten year, it's a bloody great start for them. And I've got the best kindergarten teachers in the world down there.

Unlike some other schools from the study where social welfare took precedence and staff were unable to meaningfully engage with the Quality Teaching Framework (see NSWDET, 2006), the principal of Kingfisher was adamant that beyond physical beautification and making the school a happy place for kids, the most important ingredient was the development of high quality teaching.

> We've got three non-teaching AP's [assistant principals]. One I've employed through SiP[10] funding, and she's our quality teaching mentor, because the key to any successful school, before anything else, is good teaching in the classroom…. You can apply any welfare programme you like to prop things up, but the key is having kids who want to come to class, having effective class lessons, having kids leave class lessons learning, and leaving happy and motivated. That's the key. So, I've employed a dedicated person to do quality teaching… accelerated literacy, all of that stuff. I have another AP that is dedicated to infants: K-2. She is dedicated to supporting teachers, behaviour support, all of those areas. I have another non-teaching AP who does all our casual work because one of our big problems was that when we had a casual teacher come in and take a "colourful" class, we were mopping up three days after from it! We were in damage control, because they didn't understand the kids. If we've got a resident in here who knows the children, she takes the class and it becomes a beautiful day for the kids rather than a disaster.

Significantly, the principal at KPS used the various amounts of funding that he had received to institute changes that he believed would be sustainable.

> …when we start a programme we look at sustainability because we know – we're hoping the funding will stay, but we're also realising that we've got to make programmes sustainable… what I'm trying to do more than anything else is build quality teaching into our school, because that's a sustainable part of the programme. The fact that teachers teach well, the fact that teachers can liaise with parents well, can develop those community – those partnerships with parents. All of those things to do with quality teaching, if they're there, if they're embedded in the school, then funding's not an issue…

The focus on quality teaching at Kingfisher Public paid many dividends. First, the staff began to stabilise and became a cohesive team with a common objective. In other disadvantaged schools visited during the research, staff attrition represented a significant problem because no sooner would teachers be trained up, then they would leave and the school would have to begin again. While this was a risk for KPS, the gamble of heavily investing in staff paid off.

> I can honestly say this is the most stable and the most joyful staff I've ever worked with, and because they're joyful, because they're supportive of each other, they want to be here… It's a challenging school – or it was. It's not so much now … we support each other, and it's a great

> place to work… Not too many people go. They used to, years ago. They wanted to get out. They didn't want to come here to start with! But now? No.

With retention in staff, came "unity of purpose" and a common vision for the school that was "all about the kids". The vision at KPS was strongly informed by the view that every child can and has a right to learn. Practices and policies were adjusted to support learning but in innovative and creative ways. In other schools visited during the research, the executive would engage in covert streaming to "reduce the range of the class" for the teacher however, at Kingfisher, the principal did quite the opposite, to the extent where he 'disbanded' both IM classes. While we described this strategy in our introduction, it warrants further discussion given it is suggestive of what we envisage as an alternative approach to the question of 'access'.

The conditions for access for children in the IM class were severely restrictive, as evidenced by their behaviour and poor educational experiences. This raises an important issue which accentuates our warning about assumptions based on notions of individual deficit and the danger of focusing on raising student capacity. Elsewhere, "IM classes" were viewed as a way to support student learning as this excerpt from another school in the study shows:

> …there was a boy here… his parents had an opportunity of going to the District IM class, and I encouraged that, but they had such an emotional attachment to this school, they didn't want to. I begged them, when [he] was in Year 3, I begged them: could he please go down to [district IM class] and do a bit of catch-up because, as you know, those IM classes are marvellous. They've got all the latest technology, plus teacher's aides, and they've only got six or eight kids, so it makes such a difference, I think. If a child's in that environment, they can make great headway, whereas if they're in a class of thirty kids, it's difficult. It's very difficult for the teacher, because ninety percent of the time the teacher's really worried about this child who's not coping. It's very difficult… (Principal, Northern Sydney Region)

The assumption in such cases is that segregated settings and more intensive support will, as this principal says, help the child to "catch up" but at no time does this principal call into question what the child is being expected to do in the first place. A significant point to note is the deep appreciation of temporality in the construction of conditions of access and this is particularly so in the case of curriculum and equity in student achievement (Graham, 2007c). The heavy focus in certain Western industrialised countries on competition, prescription and assessment has reduced the time that classroom teachers have to work with the natural range of abilities present in their class. Faced with crowded curriculums and intense scrutiny of their work, many teachers resort to "teaching to the syllabus". Meanwhile, somehow, the "average schoolchild" that the syllabus *creates* has come to dictate notions about "normal" learning progress

(Graham, 2006). As a consequence support programs become overloaded with students who "don't get it" the first time round for their teachers "have to get through the content" and no longer have time to return for "the stragglers". Over time these students become disenfranchised by the increasing demands of the academic curriculum (Teese, 2000; Teese & Polesel, 2003), which goes some way towards explaining why enrolment in support classes and special schools, as well as suspension and expulsion increase significantly in the secondary years of schooling (Graham, 2008b).

At Kingfisher however, the focus on quality teaching allowed space for attention to the conditions of access. Quality teaching was understood as a bridge between curriculum and student learning, but rather than "dumbing down" the curriculum for these students, as so often is the case, the staff at KPS determined to "raise the bar":

> …generally speaking it would be very easy to dumb the curriculum down here – and it was dumbed down before I got here, because when the school was 500+, the school had massive problems with behaviour and the school had very low self esteem and it had very poor English… and I've come in and with the Executive staff, we've said, "We've got to raise the bar. We've got to put the level there so kids can reach for that, rather than bring it down to their level."

To our minds, there is much to be learned in this strategy of "raising the bar". Such an emphasis leads to enhanced student capabilities. To explain, we again draw on the bookshelf concept drawn from Burbules, Lord and Sherman (1982), which Graham (2007, p. 548) has developed elsewhere:

> Educational inputs can assist the child by positively influencing criteria of access – providing a footstool to assist the child to reach the book, so to speak. In the case of access to the curriculum, however, raising children by one foot in order to reach a particular book on a particular shelf is not necessarily going to help them when they need to reach a different book on a higher shelf. Climbing the curriculum is an exercise in accumulation and consolidation (Teese, 2000), so children not only need to access that first book on the first shelf, but also many more from there… Like climbing a rock wall, children need to gain a safe initial foothold from which to progress. However, in their schooling career, they will need continued access and the ability to reach the next book on the next shelf, and so on.

Unlike the majority of other schools visited during the study, where disability support funding was discussed not in terms of dollars but in hours, the principal at Kingfisher realised that using a teacher's aide was a non-renewable resource.[11] Instead, by disbanding the IM classes, KPS used the extra teaching positions to reduce class sizes and to up-skill classroom teachers through intensive focus on quality teaching.

> We've been able to actually structure a couple of classes. For example [in Year 6] we've got a class of boys, a class of girls, and then a class of boys and girls who are very, very bright and

> who are behaviour problems. I put those children together because the bright kids work with the behaviour problems and the class has become a "normal" class. So we've been able to do that through having those two positions available. …it's proved to be very, very good, because it's also improved their academic results as well. There's been a definite improvement with these kids.

These reforms are mutually reinforcing: investment in staff affects pedagogy and the ability of staff to interpret and translate curriculum at appropriate levels. While the academic curriculum operates as a condition of access, differentiation of the curriculum through skilled teaching modifies the conditions (providing a footstool) while building the capacity of students to consolidate what they have learned and put it to work in higher order tasks (enabling them to reach for the next book on the next shelf). This is different to the 'dumbing down' of curriculum content however, for such an approach will never lead to a continuation of access. Prior to this change, certain students had their conditions of access curtailed by their segregation into an "IM" class. By changing the conditions of access, KPS in effect improved the capability set for those students. Further, the school gave the students' time to improve their behaviour, and importantly, their academic results. These two areas are not separate. Indeed, the principal considered them as deeply linked. We agree and suggest here that responding to the pressure to conform to timescales is critical to social inclusion. In the following excerpt the principal not only stresses the importance of time, but the quality of the teachers is expounded.

> I'll be very keen to see the NAPLAN results this year, because when I first came here, those kids would have done NAPLAN this year… There have certainly been improvements in isolated areas, but it's not akin to the cultural change of the school… my [district executive] has been asking me this question all the time, you know, "Have we seen any results?" And he knows that these cogs take a long time to turn… particularly academic results. You can change the culture, but the academics don't occur for a long time. I believe there'll be a change this year with Year 3, and I believe there'll be a change this year with Year 5…

While the principal was under pressure to produce 'measurable' outcomes through improvement of student performance in standardised assessments, we would argue that the other indicators we have described (stabilised enrolments, regular attendance, improvement in behaviour, positive and purposeful environment, and engagement of students/parents and staff) are of fundamental and lasting importance. For the students at KPS, the transformation of Kingfisher into an inclusive school community has had multiple benefits. The feeder high school has commented on the improvement in the students coming through, they are more able to attack higher order curriculum, they experience less frustration and enjoy higher self-esteem.

Like Tralee but in different ways, Kingfisher Public School has been successful at drawing on existing resources and professional knowledge banks to address both the criteria and conditions of access. The positive changes in both of the schools occurred as a result of the principals recognising the paucity in existing techniques that focussed purely on individual criteria of access, criteria that continually fell to the repetitive (and easy) explanation of deficits within students. Their shift in focus to take into account the conditions of access resulted in both successful and sustainable changes in the cultural practices taking place in these schools.

Conclusion

Diversity has long been recognised as beneficial for student achievement (Coleman, Campbell, Holson, McPartland, & Mood, 1966), and the benefit that inclusive schools offer all students is now internationally recognised (OECD, 1995; 1999). Empirical research has further demonstrated the pivotal relationship between student engagement, educational marginalisation and social exclusion (Vinson, 2007), emphasising the foundational role of inclusive education for active citizenship, economic participation and social inclusion. However, preventing the marginalisation of vulnerable students has become infinitely more complex in recent years. The effort to make schools more inclusive (UNESCO, 2001 2008), together with the pressure to retain students until the end of secondary school (OECD, 2004), has greatly increased both the number and educational requirements of students enrolling in their local school. Research has shown that it can be difficult for schools to negotiate away from the pressure to categorise or diagnose such students (Graham & Spandagou, 2008; Norwich, 2008; Riddell, 2000), particularly those with challenging behaviour. Of critical concern, despite years of research and improvements in policy, pedagogy and educational knowledge (Comber & Kamler, 2004), is the enduring categorisation and marginalization of students with diverse abilities (Graham, 2007a; 2008a; Harwood, 2000; 2006; Slee, 1995; 2005).

This paper has shown that there are situations where schools can act positively to (re)engage students and families traditionally alienated by schooling; enhancing the capabilities of both staff and students in the process. Physical and academic barriers to participation require modification however as we showed via our case-study of two government schools in New South Wales, adjustments in and modification of the conditions of access does not equal "dumbing down" of curriculum or reducing expectations for disadvantaged students. Nor does working on the criteria of access mean that the conditions of access (or barriers to participation) can be ignored. Certainly, the enhancement of students' capabilities is one

avenue for schools interested in reform but enhancing practitioner capabilities is an even more powerful agent of change as they are the only ones with the power to modify the conditions of access. The two case study schools highlighted in this paper managed to attend to both in different but equally innovative ways. Importantly, each school drew on existing resources to expand knowledge banks and produce a renewable source of capital through the development of inclusive school communities and the capabilities of staff and students.

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Contributors

Dr Linda Graham completed her doctoral study, titled "Schooling Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders: educational systems of formation and the 'disorderly' school child" at Queensland University of Technology in 2007. Of particular interest was how schooling practices and discourses may be contributing to the increased diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In 2007 Linda was Senior Research Associate in Child & Youth Studies in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at The University of Sydney, and in 2009 she began a research fellowship in the Children and Families Research Centre, Macquarie University, Sydney. Her research interests concern the role of education in the medicalisation of childhood and institutional responses to children who are hard to teach.
Dr Valerie Harwood is Senior Lecturer in Educational Foundations in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong. Her research interests relate to the cultural processes relating to the application of child and youth psychopathology. Her research has developed interdisciplinary theorisation of how psychiatric and psychological diagnoses have become widespread cultural practices in education, and the implications of these on the formation of

student identities. She is the author of *Diagnosing Disorderly Children,* published in 2006 with Routledge.

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[1] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the schools and participants.

[2] IM is term used to describe one of five categories of disability eligible for additional support funding in New South Wales: Intellectual Impairment is graded into three levels: IM – mild impairment, IO – moderate impairment and IS – severe impairment.

[3] This is particularly important in the area of behaviour for research has shown that primary and secondary schools operate on the assumption that children already know the social and organisational scripts for "doing school". The result to infractions of the code is disciplinary, whereas the positive guidance approach may be more appropriate for students in primary schools (SMH, 2009).

[4] See discussion in Hayes et al., (2009) for an up-to-date description of the Disadvantaged Schools Program.

[5] Kingfisher is ranked as a PP2 school due to its enrolment characteristics.

[6] The principal of the highly-advantaged school described earlier in this paper also mentioned that his school explicitly "taught" social skills through a games program. Interestingly, this principal had most of his teaching experience in the Western suburbs of Sydney and this informed his work with the boys at his most recent school on Sydney's leafy north shore.

[7] New South Wales Primary Schools Sports Association, Department of Education and Training School Sport Unit

[8] Together with Teese's "cognitive architecture of the curriculum", this Tour de France analogy informed the conceptual framework for thinking about curriculum and equity (Graham, 2007c; Luke, Graham, Sanderson, Voncina, & Weir, 2006). Thinking about the athlete attributes required for the Tour is an instructive way to consider what it takes for school students to successfully ascend the academic school curriculum.

[9] Billabong is an Australian term for waterhole.

[10] SiP represents the NSWDET Schools in Partnership program which "rewards schools that take the initiative to develop local solutions… Partnership schools receive between $100,000 and $400,000 per year in additional funding to help them set and achieve annual targets for improving literacy and numeracy results, school retention rates and school attendance" (see https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/newsroom/yr2006/sep/partnersh_init.htm).

[11] Almost every participant described their Funding Support allocation in hours, meaning how many teacher aide hours the funding enabled them to buy. The funding is provided directly to schools and can be used to release teachers for additional planning and programming time, for professional development, to bolster targeted learning support or for a teacher's aide. Regardless of the disability type involved and whether an aide was actually the best use of the funding, Funding Support was almost exclusively used for this purpose.